

CHAPTER 124**(SJR 23)**

A JOINT RESOLUTION declaring Kentucky a Food is Medicine state and directing state agencies to advance Food is Medicine initiatives.

WHEREAS, the United States spends \$4.5 trillion annually on health care with 90 percent of those expenditures covering care for people with chronic physical and mental health conditions; and

WHEREAS, six in 10 Americans have at least one chronic disease and four in 10 have two or more chronic diseases; and

WHEREAS, diet-related physical conditions such as obesity impact 41.9 percent of adults in the United States and result in \$173 billion annually in health care costs; and

WHEREAS, in Kentucky, 40.4 percent of adults have at least one chronic physical disease such as diabetes or heart disease, which results in over \$29.4 billion in health care expenses annually; and

WHEREAS, the incidence of chronic disease is higher in rural and other areas underserved by health and community resources compared to better served areas which intensifies population health disparities in the state; and

WHEREAS, some state pilot programs and national studies have demonstrated that Food is Medicine intervention programs, especially when administered in clinical settings, can prevent and improve health care outcomes for chronic diseases, thereby reducing chronic disease rates and health care costs; and

WHEREAS, Kentucky has pioneered Food is Medicine efforts, including the Kentucky Hospital Association's (KHA) partnership with the Kentucky Department of Agriculture (KDA), to launch a dedicated initiative to integrate health care and agriculture with the goal of making Kentucky citizens healthier by addressing poor diet, food insecurity, and agriculture production barriers as well as health insurance provisions, basic nutrition needs, and chronic disease management; and

WHEREAS, Kentucky hospitals, through the KHA and its members, are leading in the Food is Medicine initiative by creating and implementing Food is Medicine programs in clinical settings and employee care programs that track and monitor health outcomes; and

WHEREAS, declaring Kentucky a Food is Medicine state will build on the foundations of the KHA and the KDA partnership by fostering collaboration among health care providers, private insurers, managed care organizations, state agencies, local governments, and nonprofit organizations to expand initiatives using local farm products in nutritional health interventions; and

WHEREAS, the Food is Medicine state declaration aligns with Kentucky's commitment to improving population health, reducing health disparities, and promoting preventive care as cost-effective strategies for long-term fiscal sustainability, particularly amid Kentucky's ongoing battle against nutrition-sensitive chronic diseases; and

WHEREAS, the Kentucky Employees Health Plan (KEHP) expends \$2 billion annually to provide health benefits to nearly 300,000 current and former public employees and dependents; and

WHEREAS, KEHP has an established wellness rewards program that provides plan members with incentives for intentional practices, habits, and initiatives that lead to improved health outcomes and help reduce overall healthcare costs; and

WHEREAS, community supported agriculture (CSA) is a growing sector of Kentucky's agricultural economy that allows farmers to offer shares of their seasonal harvest directly to the public, providing farmers with predictable income and improved farm viability, thereby leading to strengthened food systems and stronger rural economies; and

WHEREAS, CSA programs improve public access to fresh, nutrient-dense foods aligned with the dietary guidelines for Americans, support improved eating habits and nutrition, help prevent chronic disease, and can reduce overall healthcare costs; and

WHEREAS, researchers examining the University of Kentucky's long-standing CSA program reported improved dietary habits, reduced doctor's office and clinic visits, and initial savings of \$2.47 in medical expenditures for every \$1 spent on the program; and

WHEREAS, providing additional incentives to KEHP participants to consume healthier, more nutrient-dense foods through CSA programs is an important first step to improving the health of our state's workforce, a tool for supporting and growing Kentucky's farm families and agricultural economy, and a pathway to reducing healthcare costs for governmental employers across the Commonwealth;

NOW, THEREFORE,

Be it resolved by the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky:

➔Section 1. The General Assembly hereby declares Kentucky to be a Food is Medicine state to recognize the critical role of nutrition in preventing and managing chronic diseases and to promote the use of local food products in health care systems.

➔Section 2. State agencies are directed to advance Food is Medicine initiatives by taking all appropriate actions, including but not limited to:

(1) Affirming the integration of nutrition as a core component of medical treatment and public health policy;

(2) Supporting coordination with the Kentucky Hospital Association, the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, and other relevant agencies and partners to pilot medically tailored meals and produce prescriptions for high-risk populations;

(3) Forming public-private partnerships to support local food systems and community-based food delivery; and

(4) Supporting evaluations to measure the health outcomes, cost savings, and impacts of Food is Medicine initiatives.

➔Section 3. (1) The Personnel Cabinet is hereby directed, in consultation with the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, to integrate community supported agriculture (CSA) purchases into the wellness rewards programs offered to public employees and retirees who receive health insurance coverage through the Kentucky Employees Health Plan (KEHP), for plan years 2027 and 2028.

(2) The Personnel Cabinet shall:

(a) Provide a process by which a KEHP plan participant can verify proof of their purchase of a CSA product or contract;

(b) Determine a reward value or values in the KEHP wellness program for the participant's purchase of a CSA product or contract;

(c) Develop a process to evaluate the participation rate of KEHP members claiming wellness program rewards for CSA purchases; and

(d) Work collaboratively with the Kentucky Department of Agriculture to market and provide information on CSA programs, including but not limited to preparing information for distribution to plan participants and attending KEHP wellness fairs.

(3) The Personnel Cabinet may:

(a) Implement the wellness rewards program option required in this section through a third-party administrator; and

(b) Consult with the third-party administrator or the Kentucky Department of Agriculture to implement provisions of this section.

(4) The Personnel Cabinet shall implement this section for the wellness rewards program in the KEHP 2027 plan year.

➔Section 4. By July 1, 2028, for plan year 2027, and by July 1, 2029, for plan year 2028, the Personnel Cabinet shall, in collaboration with the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, submit a report to the Interim Joint Committees on State Government and Appropriations and Revenue that includes but is not limited to:

(1) The total number of participants who submitted a CSA purchase for wellness rewards points;

(2) The number of participants who are, or self-identify, as first-time purchasers of a CSA product or contract as reported through survey responses;

- (3) The number of participants who self-report dietary behavior changes as reported through survey responses;
- (4) The satisfaction level of participants who purchased a CSA product or contract, including whether the participant would purchase a CSA product or contract in the future, as reported through survey responses;
- (5) Any data useful in determining potential reductions in KEHP healthcare costs; and
- (6) Options that would encourage the use of CSA purchases by KEHP participants that align with improving health outcomes, reducing healthcare costs, and providing more market viability for Kentucky farmers.

Signed by Governor April 13, 2026.